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SUBJECT: PRIVATE KURDISH LANGUAGE SCHOOLS FIGHT RED TAPE

REF: ANKARA 1532

**¶11.** (U) Summary: Five private Kurdish language instruction schools (Van, Batman, Sanliurfa, Diyarbakir and Adana) are open for business and have registered hundreds of new students for the fall, after completing lengthy application procedures and meeting strict building code requirements to which few other private learning institutions are held. The schools continue to face administrative challenges, including a recent Ministry of Education decision prohibiting the use of textbooks and dictionaries that instructors had been employing for several months. Despite Turkey's progress in implementing important language rights reform measures, activists in Turkey's southeast continue to advocate for free elective Kurdish courses in public institutions, arguing that "Turkey can't solve its language problem with a few schools." End Summary.

**¶12.** (U) Since the passage of reform laws in 2002 which allowed private courses in Kurdish and other non-Turkish languages "used by Turkish citizens in their daily lives," five private Kurdish language instruction schools have opened their doors and at least two others may follow suit later this month. From September 1 through 3, poloff visited schools in Batman, Sanliurfa and Diyarbakir to discuss with instructors and administrators their experiences with the approval process and opening of the schools. (Note: In addition to schools in these three cities, a course has been operating in Van, and an approved school in Adana will begin classes on September 20. Press reports indicate that schools have been approved or will soon be approved in Istanbul and Kiziltepe, District of Mardin Province, as well. End note.)

Twenty days vs. Two Years

**¶13.** (SBU) Officials at the school in Sanliurfa said they opened in March 2004, after an application process lasting more than two years. (Note: They claimed their formal application was made in December 2001, which would have preceded the passage of implementing regulations for legislation allowing Kurdish instruction. End note.) In Batman, the school opened its doors in April 2004, twelve months after beginning the application process. School administrators held an opening celebration in Diyarbakir in August 2004, after sixteen months of seeking approval. In contrast, said a teacher in Batman, a nearby driving school with the same status under the Ministry of Education completed the process in just twenty days. "There is a reason for this," he said. "It is natural that there is awkwardness as this is the first time. Ministry officials were afraid, and we all paid the price," he added. The Batman school reportedly had visits from at least ten different government agencies, ranging from municipal health and fire officials to Public Prosecutor officials checking inventories, before being given the green light.

Every centimeter counts

**¶14.** (SBU) Administrators from all three schools report being subjected to building code requirements during the approval process to which few other institutions are held. In Diyarbakir, for example, three proposed classrooms were deemed unfit for use because only 15 percent of the classroom area was covered by windows as opposed to 20 percent. The result is that the school will use nine rather than 12 of its rooms for instruction. (Note: This was reportedly due to students' need to be exposed to sunlight for health reasons; at the same time schools are authorized to give night classes. End note.) In Batman, a doorframe was determined to be five centimeters too narrow and had to be widened, with an extension added to the door so it would close properly. One observer pointed out that the Sanliurfa school is just about the only building in town with a fire escape, and it is only a two-story building. Throughout the application process, the school buildings had to be open and accessible to inspectors. Since most are housed in rented properties, this resulted in significant costs before any income was gained through student fees. Private individuals reportedly covered these and other start-up costs for the schools.

What is advanced ability?

15. (SBU) Each of the schools was required to submit the names of at least one third of its teachers at the time of application. In most cases, this amounted to just one name. The Batman school currently has three teachers (two permanent at 30 hour per week, and one contract at eight hours per week) and Sanliurfa has two teachers. The Diyarbakir school has been authorized to employ four teachers, but has not completed its hiring process yet. An official at the Sanliurfa school characterized the process of getting teachers certified as problematic. He said that the prerequisites set by the Ministry for potential teachers were: graduation from a teacher training program, two years experience, and "advanced ability." As for advanced ability, though, he said the Ministry did not issue clear standards. Contacts in Diyarbakir agreed, saying "we just had to certify we could teach Kurdish." If the Ministry is requiring certifications regarding ability, they argue, there should be a specific university faculty created, as well as texts, to prepare and test such ability.

16. (SBU) The Ministry did not approve several candidates put forward for contract positions by the school in Sanliurfa, because the individuals reportedly worked too many hours in other teaching jobs. The principal in Diyarbakir claimed that their school's first nominee for Director was a thirty-year teaching veteran, but he was not approved because he had been demoted once in his career. (Note: Despite these complaints about getting teachers approved, it is interesting that our contact in Batman was approved despite the fact that, as he told us, he had given six unauthorized classes in the past and had been "exiled to Yozgat" at one point in his career. End note.)

#### Facts and figures

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17. (SBU) At all three locations, one course of study consists of 180 hours of classroom instruction and costs 100 million Turkish Lira (TL). While only one level of course curriculum has been authorized by the Ministry of Education, in practice each of the schools appears to be performing informal testing of registrants to determine students' level of ability and grouping them in classes accordingly. Class hours vary from school to school, but each has weekend and evening classes in addition to hours during the week. To date classes have been in Kurmanji, which is the most widely spoken form of Kurdish in Turkey.

18. (SBU) In Diyarbakir there are currently 207 students enrolled for the school's first term, set to begin September 14. According to the school's officials, potential students must have completed at least four years of elementary school, regardless of their age. They said they had received some 40 to 50 individuals when registration opened who had wanted to apply since they had "waited a lifetime to learn their language in school," but they were turned away because they had not studied a sufficient amount of time in Turkish public schools. In contrast to earlier reports that students had to be at least 16 years old, Diyarbakir school contacts said that with parental permission, and fulfilling other requirements regarding public schooling, students as young as 11 could register.

19. (SBU) In Sanliurfa, the school started out last spring with 33 students. Contacts at the school claim they purposely limited the number for their first term as they worked out how the school would function. During their summer term they had 58 students in two classes, with an average age somewhere between 30 and 35. Of these, 12 students were under the age of 16. The capacity of the Sanliurfa school is 80 students. In Batman, 79 students attended classes during the school's first term. Forty-two of the students were university graduates, 20 were high school graduates and 17 had finished just elementary school. Twenty-six of those students were women, and the large majority of students were adults. For the summer course in Batman, 60 students registered, but only 50 or so attended.

#### The next important battle: Textbooks

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10. (SBU) During their first two terms, the schools in Sanliurfa and Batman had been using a variety of texts and materials in support of their instruction. The Sanliurfa school reportedly submitted a list of these texts for approval to the Ministry as early as January 2004. In July, however, the Ministry of Education issued a notice that six or seven of the texts, in their current forms, were "not appropriate as education tools." (Note: The Diyarbakir school had not received this official notification as of September 3, but expected it would receive the same news soon. End note.) The Ministry report states that the texts contain "ideological aspects per the attached report," and are therefore not suitable in the classroom. Neither the Batman nor the Sanliurfa schools, however, report having received the "attached report" referred to in the Ministry notice.

11. (SBU) In one dictionary, for example, there is reference to "Kurdistan" and the "Kurdish people," explained contacts in Sanliurfa. In another instance, a text states that "[Kurdish] people have been subject to assimilation and therefore an

overwhelming majority has forgotten the language." In its notice prohibiting the texts, the Ministry of Education has not suggested others that would be suitable, though it does allow that the texts can be used if the offending passages are removed. However this becomes a copyright issue, argue school officials. They cannot simply remove pages of books that were published by other companies.

¶12. (SBU) Administrators of the schools are communicating among themselves and with the Istanbul Cultural Institute, the publisher of at least one of the books in question, about next steps regarding the texts. The principal of the Diyarbakir school stated that he also found the texts inadequate, but for pedagogical reasons (i.e. he did not find the "offensive" passages to be derogatory to the state). His school has formed an experts committee (comprising two Turkish language teachers, two English teachers, and two other classroom teachers) to discuss the problem of texts, in general. In the meantime, until new materials are developed, it is unclear how and if the Ministry will enforce its prohibition of the existing texts. An official in Batman implied that he will keep using them: "We think they'll change their mentality," he said; "they have to."

Bring the Inspectors, Not Police

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¶13. (SBU) In addition to the flap over course materials, the Diyarbakir school is also facing problems due to two signs they have hung at the school for what they claim are "promotional" purposes. Government officials have charged that two signs at the school must be removed because their colors are those of the flag used by the PKK/Kongra Gel terrorist group. According to school officials, some 25 policemen came to the school on August 20 and stayed for three to four hours, insisting that the signs be removed. The school's administration held its ground, stating that the people "liked those colors," and that if there were a problem, they expected that the Ministry of Education would send inspectors to give official notice of the need to remove the signs. The signs were still present as of September 13.

¶14. (SBU) Comment: Each of the schools is housed in attractive facilities, none more impressive than the brightly painted seven story building in Diyarbakir, which also houses the Kurdish Pen organization and the Kurdish Institute. Busts and official portraits of Ataturk look out over Kurdish language wall decorations, and vocabulary flash cards mark doors, chairs and windows in Turkish and Kurdish. Clearly change has come to the Southeast. Nevertheless, the red tape facing administrators of these private Kurdish language instruction centers is ponderous, arbitrary, and deliberate. School officials also argue that the "hassles" and occasional police presence deter students from registering, claiming that students will be labeled as separatists. (Note: Government officials assert that the numbers of students to date simply indicate low interest. End note.)

¶15. (SBU) Comment, cont'd: Moreover, school officials were bothered by inquiries focusing on facts and figures, arguing that discussing details about the schools doesn't get at the real issue. "Turkey can't solve its language problem with a few schools," they say. They argue that Kurds in Turkey pay taxes, send their sons to the army, and fulfill other requirements of good citizenship. In return, they assert, the state offers no resources to fund this "inadequate" answer to demands for language rights. While the pioneers in Kurdish language instruction in Turkey are busy opening private schools for the moment, their struggle for free elective Kurdish courses in public institutions in Turkey will continue.

ALLISON